



TRANSCONTINENTAL

I

That summer we were all in flight
from jobs and wives
animadversions
the army and the police.

L.A. was alive with sub
-machineguns and the youth shouted
GUERNICA
GARCIA LORCA
WAR AND MURDER.

Everywhere they were on the road
going east and west
going north and south
women and birds
dogs and flower pots
an army fleeing from itself
drummed out of the hell of battle
a STRAWBERRY STATEMENT
running away from America.

We crossed the desert at night
passing through Needles
and the people boiled over
out of the radiators
of the cities
on the road
ON THE ROAD
seeking freedom while the desert
sang its death chant
to a round bowled mandolin.

The cities burst their glass balloons
and raked the faces of the people with reality.
That was the summer of suicides.
Mothers jumped from bridges
into the early morning rush hour.
Young men hung their genitals from the Statue of Liberty.
Priests splashed their vestments with gasoline
and I could hear America screaming.

And we were on the road
looking for anything:
communes among the bloodstone vistas of Taos
cabins on the Mendocino coast.
Blackblood roses burned in the hands of the rich
spilling over into flames like Stenka Razin.

The nation burst its stained
glass windows drowning in the smoke of revolution.
I think we all prayed it would come
fleeing our own self hate.

2

From the other end of memory
out of the Long Island rr yard
where blackberries grew in the crisscrossed sand
and the trains ran on to Babylon
I raced from boyhood on my bike
like Mile A Minute Murphy
hoping to catch a last vision of the west
before it vanished in housing tracts.
The wheels and cycles turned over the Korean War
into an age of assassins --
westward I went while the wheel
went backward on itself.

Drawn off
and drawn back
we are ever drawn back home
even when all we know of home is gone.

Now I leave the Berkeley Hills
famous as the battleground of a decade
I feel them fall away
like a cancerous breast
crossing the desert.

The names of women are on my face and hands.
An aging Ovid stringing all my love affairs
into poems and stories
novels and plays
recalling just one face
riding through Golden Gate
on a Harley Davidson -- you
a ringer for Anouk Aimee
myself like Trotsky.
Down and around each other we went
in faded cable cars
dreamlike, memorial
until the lines snapped off
and sent us soaring out into ourselves.

Down and around we are drawn back home
even when all we know of home is gone.

3

I am a rootless man
not an American. Happy when all I have

is sold for debts
I work only when desperate.
Shiftless
rootless
drawn back and forth between two coasts.

The desert ground us down.
Flattened us out
beat on through midnight with its hot
madness.

II

In Gallup and Window Rock
the Hopi, Zuni, Navajo
rise from the ashes of their past.
The coyote takes us off
to Pueblo Bonito
eight hundred rooms full of ghosts
wolf songs, betrayals.
And the wheel bends backward on itself.
In the dark we touch their magic hearts
a thousand years of culture
flame from the ruined rocks.
They have had their own GUERNICAS
and GARCIA LORCAS.
The moon struck with arrows
flings itself apart in the redstone dawn.

In the ash and pumice of Sunset
Crater the soul of the Pueblo
lies in pieces. We climb through the fragments
of their death
some great explosion far off
awaiting our own up close.

Screams of GUERNICA and I hear
America screaming.

In wind the summer roads
come down over the mountains soaked in blood.
The sun burns up firebombed cliffs
fallen in like great cathedrals of a dead faith
fallen in one great crash.
You can still hear the echo
climbing into Flagstaff.

Somehow they have all come home
the homeless Indians
blasted from their roots
hauled from the mountains like precious minerals
dumped in city bars and whorehouses
even the Pennitenti

who crucified a tribe member a year
are now here.

Our young in vw buses know these people
as their own.

Tribes.

On the road, ON THE ROAD
till the roads explode.

III

Then into the maggot
neck of Texas
stumbling with fundamentalists
and the flat thin dust
of Kansas wheatfields
staggered with white churches
waiting for the Wizard of Oz
to teach them flight.

Here you can contemplate whether the universe
is infinite
or if not
just what lies beyond the darkness
at the end of it.

Oh Kansas
bleeding Kansas
here I hear
America screaming in her silence.

And I hear the sick and starving
in a nation of glut
cry for doctors who live on the far side of the moon.
Who in Europe would believe it?

I hear us screaming up the phlegm
of our constitution
now protecting the few
prodding the mass. I hear the drone of police
sirens screaming always on the poor side of town.
I hear the screams of Sylvia Plath.

And I hear America screaming in varied voices
as Whitman once heard them singing:
voices of discord
boredom
madness
anger
borne up through the rubble of cities
holding the paper roses of democracy
stamped out by the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

I hear America screaming in hospital hallways
where soldiers lie forgotten
used up
torn apart
slapped together in dirty wards
by crazy patriots
who wave their obscene banners
over the bloody bones like a magic
crucifix. There is no new life
for the legless
faceless
sexless flesh they have dumped
into dark corners of the nation
hidden in the shame
of their needless sacrifice.

I hear America screaming in old age
loneliness
in two dollar tenements
eating dog food!
starving on social security checks.
Our patriarchs
tossed about like bandits
buying day old bread.
Take their homes with your taxes
America
and leave them the freedom
to die in the streets.
Why not kill them in their sleep?

I hear America screaming in alcoholic fits
and detox tanks.
I hear her coughing up the madness
of endless violence
purposeless wealth
meaningless education.
The world looks on amazed
as tumors grow from richness
and all the value of our wealth
is turned to sickness.
Some day the people of the world
will rip off
the rubber
mask of your hardcore
economics
and hang your philanthropists
from their countryclub
pulpits.

I hear the blacks cursing in prisons
MOTHERFUCK AMERIKA
they spell it with a K
after Kafka.

They know your
trickle down
screw the people
justice.

They know the murder of your streets.

In Kansas I hear the heartbeat.
In bleeding Kansas.

2

What if the universe
and all that we can see/conceive
is just the inner workings
of some great insect
contemplating a larger sphere
a hundred trillion
to the hundredth power as big?
Stop and think of that
as you cut your wheat
O Kansas.

The one legged armies in their impotence
follow us through Oklahoma
in hobbling chicken stands
and dirty gas station bathrooms
where a concerned citizen wrote:
THE OKLAHOMA HIGHWAY ENGINEERS MAKE UP
FOR LACK OF INTELLIGENCE AND FORESIGHT
BY RETAINING A GREAT
SENSE OF HUMOR.

They have built the towns on the bones
of buffalo
but the buffalo will someday
roam the streets munching cornflowers.

The midwestern farmers
are wise and ironic
with worn faces
plowed necks
barbed wire dreams
hobnail boots growing on cornstalks.
Their women wait
hot and horny
on broken porches
hoping for the coming of
a tornado like JEEEEESUS
CHRIST. When that day comes
the white churches of the silent majority
will crawl off on their naves
in horror.

Charlie Starkweather
as the second coming.
Saturday night the only reality.

Torn between two coasts
I'm tossed back and forth
by the heartbeat of America.

IV

The beaters drive the masses into cities
they have thrown the shot into the cannon
priming them down
with the rest mere physics.

St. Louis means decay.
St. Louis where the wagons once began.

The cycle turns back on itself
until the wheel is visibly crushed
buckled over in time.
On and on that year
through the smoke of cities
bridges breaking off
in the middle of intercourse
melted at the stress points.
Now it is underground.
The next surfacing of tumors
will be fatal.

On the road
ON THE ROAD
till the roads explode.

From here the pioneers set forth
now they have all come back
bloody with quest
and madness.
The screams of America are real
screams and Whitman would know them from singing.
Hart Crane in the brain.
They know the manifest destiny
proclaimed when the first Indians died of smallpox
from blankets issued by the government.

V

So up through the slag mines
and mining towns of West Virginia
seeing INDIANA only at night.
Up through the black lungs of America
up through the smoke and ruined mountains.
Up through the dead dreams of Appalachia.

"Put the blood of yr cunt
in his whiskey and he'll marry ya."

He kissed her breasts and kissed her eyes
(LIBERTY)
but his penis would not rise
(REVOLUTION).

In sadness it is borne off
through the black lungs and hollow chested
mountains.
I have watched the dams collapse
dreamed of home to find it gone
lost in the rosary of rainsoaked mountains.

VI

On to Monticello
temple of reason
raison
long ago we cashed it in
for Andy Jackson and his banks.

Arches and domes of Elysium
as though our thoughts
had once touched Athens.
But the road to reason runs backward
through the soul of revolution
pausing at the bridge of slavery
from whence there was no return.

ON THE ROAD, ON THE ROAD
TILL THE ROADS EXPLODE.

I make my bow to Monticello
a holy place.
Here was the last great dreamer
the last great dream.
All the rest is misery.
On to Richmond and D.C.

But the hills of Virginia
echoing with battles
are green and lush.
I love them most of all.
They draw me home to the home
of my forebearers, my bloodkin
and I know with Aurelius
that life is travel in a strange land
with the fame that follows it
oblivion.

Touch the thoughts of Jefferson to Pliny
the smith weds silver to glass.

So up through the final hills at dawn.
On to Richmond
Let them come.

VII

That summer was the summer of marches.
Soon armies will come into Washington
no longer herded like sheep
in even lines by police.

They will come without their cameras
holding submachine guns
shouting GARCIA LORCA
GUERNICA
and men will say again
"If this be treason make the most of it."

They will fight in all the old
stone monuments to freedom
now cold and empty
with lies and broken promises.
Damn me if you will but I see the people on fire
with a new declaration
of independence.

I see them tearing out the nuclear brain stem
of madness and scattering the secret
police. I see them ripping out the eyes of the FBI.
They will drive the lobbyists and moneylenders
from the temples of democracy.

Run corporate friends
the tribes of man are coming.

Here come the new Minute Men.
The new Green Mountain Boys.
I can see them. I can.
And the cycle bends back like a wheel
turned inward
into JACOBINS.
Marat, Danton. On to Richmond.
Let them come.
A new Potomac Tea Party
dumping the contents of the Pentagon
into the river.

To deny it
won't stop it.

VIII

The essence of all madness is the madness of Manhattan.
Running along through the streets of Danton
's revolution (as historian)
through courtyard pistol boxes
matched and balanced in the first Gironde
down through the sloping argument of metaphysics
it all breaks down and ends in terror.

Forms run through the husks of Manhattan
passing Danton on roller skates
catching up with Robespierre in Harlem
with patrolmen following
pinning down a paper dragon
on maps in some urine filthy
stationhouse. That is the way it ends
with police blowing their whistles through the flames
of a final Manhattan.

We wrap our jaws in a scarf.
Our symbol is the broken jaw
going before the guillotine.

O Berkeley, I saw then kill and kill back.
It is the same in Harlem
Jackson State
San Quentin.

If the people rise they will rise;
if they fall it is all the same.

On the road
ON THE ROAD
till the roads implode.

The streets of Manhattan weep like the last
crucifixion of man.
High on Fifth Avenue
overlooking the park
they have locked their doors against the dark
but that will not protect them
from their creations
of poverty
fear, rusted rivers
nightmares of plutonium.

Black man.
Get out of New York as fast as you can.
Death strikes hardest at the brain.

IX

Here at the wall of American logic
 I tap reality
 hoping to break through
 the plaster of language
 birdcage of the brain
 seeing suddenly the body of the nation
 gushing blood from the bowels
 twisting from a carwreck of jumbled rhetoric
 holding its vocal
 cords in its hands
 the mental patterns scrambled
 sound not coming up
 throat torn out
 the eyes dim
 the face convulsed and retching
 in a vengeance of small nations.
 Only television
 tapping on
 still tapping on with dreams.

Another car buckles the skull
 brains crushed like a helmet
 of oatmeal
 famine and pestilence
 rage and ruin
 death on a pale horse of blind economics;

America, I knew you once.

X

That was the summer we were all in flight.
 I'm gone from the land now.
 Skipped continents.
 The wheel is broken
 in a splinter of spokes.
 The world of America spins on without me.
 Me without her.
 The roads end where the sea begins.
 The spokes are cycles of broken dreams.

Now I play Ovid at Tomi
 what we get away with
 as poets in this city
 with its drunken beech trees
 and rain smeared sadness.

A sudden wind sends a golden nutstorm
 through the chestnuts.
 I am not working.

My wife does not complain.
I am writing this afterword
to you.

My daughter plays hopscotch
in the Tuilleries.
Later I sail a boat in the fountain
where fish take bread from my hands.

So warm I think of you
today and the girls on Rue de la Paix
show their first spring dresses.

Today I will look only
at Matisse
and perhaps Renoir who sd
painting would be nothing
without the breasts of women.

In the end death comes
as a friend.

The Disciples of Camus

"there is but one serious philosophic problem, and
that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not
worth living amounts to answering the fundamental
question of philosophy."

-- Camus: Myth of Sisyphus

Arnold Kaufman loved Camus.
In his great black overcoat
he trod all over Montparnasse
threatening the world with suicide.
"I will fling myself
from the top of metaphysics
to fall on the stones of Zeno."
His girl friend Jeanne
bought him wine
kept his socks mended
worked as a waitress in the Rue Pigalle.
In winter he debated with the Maoists
again threatening with his life.
"If you say THAT
I will kill myself in the middle of the Louvre
before David's painting of Marat."
Then he drew a pen knife from his briefcase
and cut off his right eyebrow.
Ah, he waved Kafka at them and Thomas Mann.
They waved their little red books.

It was a standoff thru February
till one day his friends carried
the body of Jeanne all the way back
from Notre Dame
from whence she had jumped in silence.

It took all the wind out of his
arguments.

Three Poets in the Dark

at Neuilly
one with a blue pipe
reciting Po Chi-I
the others drinking white
wine in chipped glasses
with the aromatic
smoke encircling them

three poets
in a winter bar
the snow piled up on the banks of the Seine
in blue heaps
speaking tonight of the Fauvists
and the Chinese
poets

Oh who would have these three
but Paris? -- two Americans
one North
Vietnamese

each having fled in terror
from the extremes of wealth and order
each without an
audience
in this city of art
happy in poverty
three in a room on squalid
Rue St. Jacques

"They will pick at our things years from now,
collecting our pneumatics and post cards," says the
man with the blue pipe. "They will buy up
our shirts and manuscripts and call us a
movement," says the Vietnamese. "Who will survive
to explain? Not me."

"I'll try," says the younger American eating
almonds. They are solemn for a moment
then burst into laughter. In the Metro cold
touches their throats;

hats and faces
coats and shoulders
crowd them into the rumbling
blackness
and they are suddenly aware
of Artaud
's "art is shit."

Poem for a Girl on Ice

I saw you
in the morning after drinking
eggs and beer
together
with a little coffee
resting on the lettuce
in between the milk and cream
cheese with the light out
and the freezer melting a watery
skin down your breasts and belly,
holding two geraniums
yr ear stuck to a grapefruit can.

When I put away the butter
I remember seeing something
in the late night
coming in
stumbling on the cat's bowl
falling on the handle
so the white door half opened
to what I thought was hair
along the egg shelf.

There was no note
only a smile and the two
geraniums
both white
and a nightgown of ice
that dripped all night from the freezer
compartment
preserving all your lovely
infidelities.

Phenomenological Photographs

1.

A litter of pens
matches, playing cards,
a gray ash
tray adorned with shells;
cigarettes and coffee cups.

The cups are arranged as variables
the matches struck
one by one
the cigarettes consumed
over a period of four hours
the cards shuffled, dealt,
played out and restacked
the ash tray filled with butts.

2.

This time stones and watches,
fragments of stained glass
three nude photos of orgies
stuck in and out
of an envelope
the envelope wrinkled
the stones gathered in a gold box
the fragments of stained glass
absorbing various light intensities
then darkness and the watches
stop.

3.

A rose in a broken bowl
a ragged red rose
wilted, scentless
petals falling off
filling the broken bowl
with the color
of smeared lipstick.

Short Dialogue

Philosopher: Do you think you have solved the problem?

Poet: I am not sure what the problem is all about.

Philosopher: Can you state the problem?

Poet: I cannot state it properly. I mean I cannot
state it as a philosopher. I can only state it
as a poet.

Philosopher: State it as a poet.

Poet: When all things are possible, the possibility
of the impossible then becomes impossible.

Philosopher: Yes, that is the problem. By stating
it, you have solved it.

-- Ben Pleasants

Beverly Hills CA